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Alpine open spaces are becoming noticeably scarcer. This statement applies to the inherently limited area of potential permanent settlement in the Alps. The population is growing in many of the valleys and with it the infrastructure required. However, the open spaces situated at altitudes above the settlements are also being successively broken up and exploited, for example through the construction of new cable cars and hydro-electric facilities, or through increasingly intensive types of land use (e.g. mountain biking). In Bavaria and Tyrol, the conservation of open space began early, with the implementation of the Bavarian Alpine Plan (Alpenplan) and the Tyrolean Open Spaces (Ruhegebiete), which set spatial planning objectives for the entire Alpine area. Today, there are similar initiatives, of varying degrees of success, in all the other Alpine states.

In *The analysis, evaluation and safeguarding of Alpine open spaces through regional and spatial planning*, a group of experts analyse these initiatives, compare and critically assess their stipulations, how the open spaces function, and how the planning for them is being implemented, with a focus on the eastern part of the Alps. After an introductory chapter, there follows a very useful examination of what is meant by the complex term *open space*. Open spaces are defined as “*areas free of development of any kind, or which are not predominantly developed (with punctual, or with linear or area-like infrastructure), and which are potentially capable of vegetation, ideally free of traffic, reserved as far as possible for non-motorized traffic and thus noise-free (Technical) infrastructures are minimal*” (p. 9).

In three further chapters, the authors first deal with the supranational requirements of the Alpine Convention and the EU’s macro-regional strategy EUSALP. Importantly, the authors note that the plans of the EUSALP Action Groups do not currently include any essential spatial planning aspects for the Alpine core area. In contrast, the authors present the Alpine Plan implemented in 1972 as a central element of the

land development programme (*Landesentwicklungsplan*) in Bavaria, and Open Spaces, which has been an integral part of the Nature Conservation Act of Tyrol since 1975. The fact that these exemplary pieces of legislation are not immune to dilution is shown by the weakening of the Alpine Plan currently intended by the Bavarian Government. For the remaining Alpine countries, the study presents other approaches to maintaining open spaces, although these approaches have not so far been implemented.

The authors summarize that as yet there are no harmonized cross-border approaches in the Alpine area with regard to the maintenance of Alpine open spaces. One of the justifications for this mentioned are the very different starting positions of the individual Alpine countries. For example, the Alpine Convention, which would provide a good basis for an Alpine-wide open space policy, has a very different status within the various Alpine states. According to the authors, the Alpine Convention, and in particular its spatial planning protocol, should be given an important place in the Alpine states’ agendas. This would be more effective than the EUSALP strategy in achieving the sustainable development of the Alps as a whole.

By examining how Alpine open spaces might be secured, the publication addresses an important topic. The focus is very much on the instrumental level of spatial planning, which may become more important on the political level. In view of the prevailing neoliberal policies, what is to be expected other than the further deregulation of Alpine spatial planning? Would there not, first of all, be a need for the political will of the Alpine countries and regions to seriously address current global political developments and the resulting economic structural changes (in agriculture, tourism, industry, etc.)? If this political will were to succeed, a good spatial planning policy that included well-founded open space planning could be an effective means for the prosperous development of the Alps. But without the political will of the Alpine states and the EU, sustainable development in the Alpine region will unfortunately not succeed. Consequently, the present important and useful evaluation of the existing spatial planning instruments for safeguarding Alpine open spaces should now be followed by a detailed analysis of the framework conditions for future sustainable Alpine spatial development.

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